

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release
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GRC to Consider Major Pieces of Legislation

D.C. Voting Rights, Restoring FEMA Independence on Agenda

What: GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMITTEE BUSINESS MEETING

When: THURSDAY, MAY 18, 2006, 3:00 P.M.

Where: ROOM 2154, RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

Background:

Several major pieces of legislation will be considered by the Government Reform Committee this week:

- **H.R. 5316, the Restoring Emergency Services to Protect Our Nation from Disasters Act of 2006; and**
- **H.R. 5388, the District of Columbia Fair and Equal House Voting Rights Act of 2006; and**
- **HR 398, the No Taxation Without Representation Act of 2005**

H.R. 5316, the RESPOND Act, was introduced on May 9, 2006, by Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA), Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Don Young (R-AK), Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management Subcommittee Chairman Bill Shuster (R-PA), and more than 50 other bipartisan cosponsors.

The legislation would restore the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as an independent, Cabinet-level agency within the executive branch. The legislation would also strengthen the agency by creating emergency response centers and teams, improving communications at all levels, and requiring the agency to establish a comprehensive workforce development strategy for its employees. Finally, the legislation would establish a National Emergency Preparedness System to ensure that the

Nation is prepared to respond to, recover from, and mitigate against the effects of all hazards and disasters.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Chairman Davis believes FEMA should go “back to basics,” to the organization structure that worked in the past. Davis chaired the House Bipartisan Select Committee that investigated Katrina and issued the “Failure of Initiative” report in February.

H.R. 5388, The District of Columbia Fair and Equal House Voting Rights Act of 2006, is sponsored by Chairman Davis, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.), Ranking Member Henry A. Waxman (D-CA), Committee Vice Chairman Christopher Shays (R-CT) and 19 others. It is an updated version of H.R. 2043, the D.C. Fairness in Representation Act. The bill would treat the District of Columbia like a congressional district for the purposes of allowing direct representation within the House of Representatives. The bill would also permanently increase the size of Congress by two to 437.

The next state in line for representation, based on the 2000 Census, is Utah. The addition of a seat for D.C. (the most Democratic jurisdiction in the nation) coupled with a seat for Utah (President Bush’s largest margin of victory in 2004) makes this a politically neutral solution. The bill does not affect Senate representation in any way.

Legal analyses by Ken Starr, Georgetown University professor Viet Dinh, and others have shown the legislation passes Constitutional muster, given Congress’s wide power over the District of Columbia.

The citizens of the District have sought a voice in Congress for over 200 years. These efforts have included lawsuits and constitutional amendments. Unlike previous efforts, which failed in part because they changed the Founding Fathers’ notion that the Federal District is a unique, federally controlled parcel, the District of Columbia Fair and Equal House Voting Rights Act preserves D.C.’s unique status. It merely grants the citizens of the District what every other American considers an inalienable right – direct representation in the House of Representatives, the People’s House.

H.R. 398, sponsored by Congresswoman Norton, provides for full voting representation in Congress – in both the Senate and the House – for the residents of the District of Columbia.

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